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ABSTRACT

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is a structured activity designed to allow students to engage in normal reading while in schcol. Characteristics of SSR include (1) students select their own materials to read, (2) each student reads silently during the SSR time period, (3) the teacher also reads silently, and (4) the period is ended by an informal discussion about what was read. At the secondary schcol level sustained silent reading is best conducted in a content area classroom. To implement an SSR program, the teacher should discuss it with the class, stimulate interest by having a wide variety of materials displayed, schedule it frequently, constantly add to and change the subject-related materials, diversify the program whenever possible, and give students a chance to evaluate SSR after a few months. (A list of classroom materials fcr use in social studies, science, mathematics, language arts, home economics, and health and physical education classes is provided.) (HCD)

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Guidelines for Secondary S.S.R.

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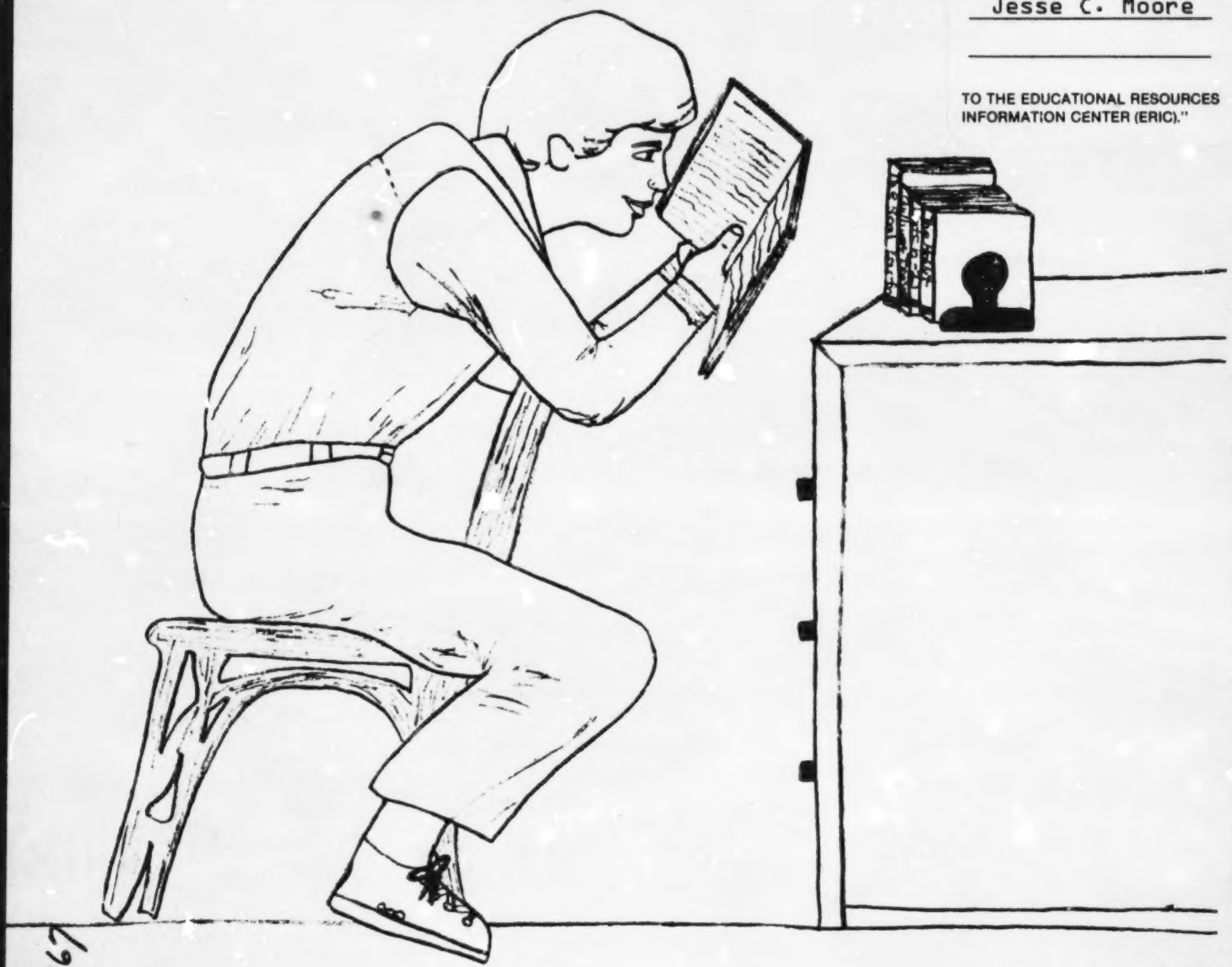

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GUIDELINES FOR SECONDARY SSR

INTRODUCTION

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a structured activity designed to allow students to engage in normal reading while in school. It is used in many schools at all grade levels so that students can practice their reading skills, expand their reading interests, and develop life-long reading habits. Too often in school, reading is done just for the teacher. At the elementary level much time is spent teaching children how to read. Skill instruction is emphasized through the use of worksheets and teacher-directed lessons. At the secondary level, students spend much of their time processing the contents of their textbooks, and normal reading may easily be neglected.

Normal reading is when a person sits down with a book, magazine, letter, newspaper, etc. and reads for whatever purpose s/he has at that moment -- enjoyment, information, how to do something, etc. In normal reading there is a personal choice by the reader and a personal interaction between the reader and writer. Whether it be in reading class or in a content-area class, personal choice and personal interaction are frequently absent in the reading that occurs in school. If students are not given the opportunity to engage in normal reading in school, they may very well become aliterate. An aliterate person is one who can read but who does not read; an aliterate person reads only for work, never for enjoyment or personal enrichment. SSR is one procedure for combating the aliteracy problem.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SSR

1. Each student selects his/her own materials to read.

Although each student is responsible for selecting the material to be read, the teacher should have an ample supply of materials from which the students can choose. No material is to be considered too easy, but if the material is quite short, the teacher should suggest that the student have more than one thing to read.

2. Each student is to read silently during the SSR time period.

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Many students lack a quiet place and time to read outside of school, so interruptions during SSR are to be discouraged. Because the ability to read for an extended period of time may not be possessed by some students, when the program is initiated, the SSR period should be short and then gradually lengthened. At the secondary level it could begin at 15 minutes and eventually be extended to 45 minutes.

3. The teacher also is to read silently.

When the teacher participates s/he is providing an important role for those students who rarely see an adult read. Also, this indirectly conveys to the students that the teacher values the SSR program and the act of reading.

4. The teacher ends the SSR period by briefly and informally talking about what s/he was reading.

Although no records are to be kept and no student is to be held accountable for what was read, the students should also be encouraged to talk about what they read. When someone has read and enjoyed something, it is normal for that person to want to talk about it with others. This time provides that opportunity, and it also helps to stimulate future reading among the class.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SSR

A secondary SSR program will usually be conducted in a content teacher's classroom, and as a group these teachers may not feel that it is their job to help improve their students' reading ability. For this reason, it is recommended that at the secondary level SSR be a classroom-based program not a school-wide one. Any teacher who does not want to participate should not be forced to do so. SSR will fail if the teacher is not enthusiastic.

On a school-wide basis, the individual teacher has no flexibility in scheduling SSR. The teacher must give up a class period or part of one whether it is opportune to do so or not. SSR "by the bells" can further alienate teachers who see it as one more interruption that keeps them from doing their job.

A major goal of secondary SSR should be to promote in students the life-long habit of reading materials in the various disciplines. If a content teacher sees SSR in this way, then it can succeed. When a history teacher, for example, sees that SSR can foster in students the habit of reading history-related materials, then SSR will be successful. The failure of SSR programs has consistently been associated with factors which did not make it seem to be a natural part of a classroom program or a normal reading situation.

Suggestions for the Teacher

1. Before beginning to use SSR, discuss it with the class. Explain why it is being used and the way in which it will be conducted. Encourage students to make suggestions, and try to incorporate them into the program.

2. Stimulate interest in SSR by having a wide variety of materials attractively displayed in the classroom before the program begins.

3. Schedule SSR frequently, once a week if possible. Always announce at least a day ahead of time when SSR will be held so that students will have the chance to bring material with them if they wish. Try to schedule it at a natural time during the week. The time remaining after a short quiz or between major topics are typical natural times.

4. After a few months of using SSR, have students evaluate it by responding anonymously to questions such as "What is your opinion of the SSR program?" and "How could the program be improved?" Use these responses to modify the program if possible.

5. Constantly add to and change the subject-related materials in the classroom. Always give a brief "book talk" as the new material is added.

6. Diversify the program whenever possible by doing such things as inviting people in for SSR and have them discuss their reading interests.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

The materials available in the secondary content classroom should reflect the diversity of reading material in that teacher's discipline. The materials should also reflect the interrelatedness of the disciplines (e.g. an article in a gourmet cooking magazine found in a home economics classroom includes the mathematical concept of proportions and a history of the people who created a particular recipe). The following is a list of suggestions which illustrate these concepts. The list is by no means complete; it is meant only to stimulate thinking.

Interdisciplinary Materials for All Classrooms

1. Local newspapers and the New York Times
2. New Magazines: Newsweek, Time, U.S. News and World Report
3. Almanacs and Record Books: Guiness Book of World Records
4. Interdisciplinary Magazines: National Geographic, Life, Psychology Today, Saturday Evening Post

Social Studies

1. Regional Magazines: Alaska Outdoors, Cape Cod Life, Philadelphia Magazine, Atlantic City, Yankee Clipper
2. State Tour Books: A.A.A. Tour Books, "I Love New York" Travel Guide
3. Special Event/Attraction Magazines: World Magazine (Disney World), Gettysburg
4. Weekly "Local Happenings" Booklets
5. Tourist Attraction Brochures
6. Novels dealing with social problems faced by teenagers: parental divorce, drugs, dropping out of school
7. Historical Novels
8. Books written about various social group in the country: the elderly, the handicapped, immigrants

Science

1. Science Magazines: Popular Science, Science 80, Scientific American, Science Digest, Science and Living Tomorrow

2. "How To" Publications dealing with science/mechanics: Elementary Electronics, Popular Mechanics

3. Automotive Magazines: Car and Driver, Motor Trend

4. Science Fiction Books and Magazines: stories by I. Asimov

5. Pseudo-scientific books and books on scientific mysteries: Chariot of the Gods, The Devil's Triangle

6. Books on scientific topics not usually taught in schools: The Silent World by Cousteau and Dumas, People of the Lake by Leakey

7. Books tracing the history of scientific ideas: Microbe Hunters by DeKruif, Six Days or Forever by Ginger

Mathematics

1. Consumer Magazines: Consumer Reports, Consumer's Research

2. Business and Personal Finance Magazines: Business Week, Venture, Money, Income Opportunities

3. "How To" Publications: Popular Mechanics

4. Games/Puzzles Publications: Games Magazine

5. Mystery Stories: the writings of Poe and Christie, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

Language Arts

1. Magazines related to the Language Arts: The Writer, Theatre Crafts, Journalism Review

2. Magazines containing essays and poetry: Atlantic Monthly, Saturday Review, The New Yorker

3. Popular Novels

4. Anthologies of Short Stories, Poems, and Plays

5. Books on Language and the Media: the writings of E. Newman and M. McLuhan

Home Economics

1. Consumer Magazines: Consumer Reports, Consumer's Research

2. Cooking Magazines and Cook Books: Gourmet, Bon Appetit, Sphere

3. Life Style Magazines: Apartment Life, Good Houskeeping, Better Homes and Gardens

4. Women's Magazines: New Woman, Seventeen, McCall's, Ladies Home Journal

Health and Physical Education

1. Health and General Sports Magazines: Health, Prevention, Sports Illustrated, Inside Sports

2. Specific Sports Magazines: Ski, International Gymnast, Baseball Digest, Skin Diver, The Runner

3. Programs from specific sporting events

4. Outdoor Magazines: Camping Journal, Adventure Travel, Four Wheel and Off Road

5. Sports Record Books

6. Biographies of Sports Figures

7. Books on Drugs and Nutrition

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